

Poverty Perspectives



Issue III – November 2013

This is the third in a series of monthly Poverty Briefs by PPAF that pulls together current data and evidence on poverty and related issues from across the country to provide a snapshot of current thinking on poverty. For your views, suggestions and comments please email us at mer@ppaf.org.pk. We will be happy to publish comments in following issues.

Women and Poverty

The critical objective of development endeavours is generally perceived to be eradication of poverty. While concerted efforts are being made internationally and nationally for alleviating poverty, there is a growing realization that poverty is taking on a feminine form. Elaborating on this, it means that globally women are bearing a disproportionately higher and growing burden of poverty. With women representing more than half the global population, rising concerns about feminisation of poverty are fully justified.

Six out of ten of the world's poorest people are women who must, as the primary family caretakers and producers of food, shoulder the burden of tilling land, grinding grain, carrying water and cooking¹. The notion of female poverty stems from the pivotal work of Diane Pearce, which examined the evolution of poverty in the United States among households headed by single mothers². Her results showed an increase among poor households of the female-headed households over time, a phenomenon she referred to as the "feminisation of poverty". Following her research, the term 'feminisation of poverty' became synonymous with the poverty of female-headed households, which were considered the poorest of the poor. In the policy arena, the poverty of female-headed households has in effect "become a proxy for women's poverty. Gender is one of a multiplicity of inequalities that combine to form the patterns of poverty and exclusion that we see in the world today⁴. According to the Global Gender report 2013, Pakistan performs below the global average on all four sub-indexes (economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment) and occupies the last spot in Asia and Pacific region. It ranks 135th out of 136 countries⁵.

The "feminization of poverty" made its major breakthrough into the development lexicon in the 1990s. A critical catalyst was the 4th United Nations Conference on Women at which it was asserted that 70% of the world's poor were female, and eradicating the "persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women" was adopted as one of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. (Chant, 2006)

¹ UNDP. (2013) Gender and Poverty Reduction. [Online] Available from: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/focus_areas/focus_gender_and_poverty.html/ {Accessed 14th January 2014}.

² Pearce, Diane. 1978. "Feminization of Poverty: Women, work and welfare." *Urban and Social Change Review* 11:228-36

³ Chant, Sylvia (2003) Female Household Headship and the Feminisation of Poverty: Facts, Fictions and Forward Strategies. London School of Economics. (Gender Institute Working Paper No. 9)

⁴ Melamed, Claire. 2012 Gender is one of the inequalities that generate poverty and exclusion. *Guardian*, 9th March. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/mar/09/gender-inequality-poverty-exclusion>

⁵ Global Gender Report 2013, The Global Gender Gap Index 2013 rankings: comparisons with 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006. Pg 22.

Current Patterns of Gender Disparity

There are multiple reasons for this magnitude of disparities. A few of them are discussed in detail below:

a) Education

Poverty is not simply the absence of financial resources. According to Amartya Sen, poverty is the lack of capability to function effectively in society. Inadequate education can thus be considered a form of poverty. Gender disparity in education primarily is what constitutes the major reason for women becoming greater victims of poverty.

The total literacy rate for Pakistan (population aged 10 years or above) is 58 % (male 70%; female 47%, PSLM 2011/12), revealing a prominent gender gap. The gap is partly explained by the fact that girls are often not sent to schools because of the distance they would have to travel, or because they are required to assist in domestic work. Regional disparities are also glaring, with Balochistan reporting around 23% literacy rate for women, Punjab stands at 51%, while Sindh was at 47%. Despite the fact that these figures are low, there is actually an increase in literacy rates when compared with the previous years.

KEY INDICATORS: BASIC EDUCATION

LITERACY RATES (10 YRS AND OLDER)	2007-08 PSLM			2010-11 PSLM			2011-12 PSLM		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
OVERALL	69	44	56	69	46	58	70	47	58
Punjab	70	48	59	70	51	60	70	51	60
Sindh	69	42	56	71	46	59	72	47	60
KPK	68	33	49	68	33	50	72	35	52
Balochistan	66	23	46	60	19	41	65	23	46

Feminisation of poverty

2013-02-17, DAWN

“WHAT comfortable stereotypes we have created: ‘It is men who carry the major burden of economic work on this planet. They are the breadwinners. Women’s work carries no economic value.’ Such work may be essential but banish the thought that it should ever enter national income accounts, or even surface in separate satellite accounts. What a successful conspiracy to reduce women to economic nonentities.” — Dr Mahbub-ul Haq

It is a well-masked secret that in Pakistan, poverty and hunger have a female face. Sometimes, the mask slips, as happened during a federal minister’s presentation to international donors and creditors at the Pakistan Development Forum a decade ago. I was present, shell-shocked. Thus, the world found out that three-quarters of Pakistan’s abject absolute poor are women and girls, i.e. for every four Pakistanis in poverty, three are women/girls.

b) Health

Health certainly has the potential to be a source of a number of different poverty traps. Lack of access to basic health services for mothers/infants, poor nutrition, poor hygiene and lack of family planning tends to be both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Women’s health issues remain a prime impeding factor in their economic, social and political growth.

According to PSLM 2011-12, the proportion of births attended by skilled attendants is only 49% whereas the MDG target was set at more than 90%. Anemia among women is widespread, with up to 40% (as against 21% of men) suffering from it. The number of lost healthy years at birth due to poor health is 6.9 for males and 9.3 for females. Reasons for poor health, other than women’s social status, include the quality and accessibility of health services as well⁶.

Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death and disability among women of reproductive age in developing countries like Pakistan. This is another factor which adds to their vulnerability. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) represents the risk associated with each pregnancy and is also an important MDG indicator. According to the National MNCH (Maternal, Neo-natal & Child Health Program) the MMR in Pakistan is 276 per 100,000 live births. The MDG goal 5 which aims at improving maternal health has a target of reducing maternal mortality to 123 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015⁷.

Indicator	1990-91 (Base line)	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2010-11	2011-12	MDG Target 2015
Proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants	18	48	41	37	40	41	43	49	>90
Proportion of women 15-49 years who had given birth during last 3 years and made at least one antenatal care consultation	15	50	52	58	56	53	62	68	100

⁶ Pakistan Poverty Assessment Update Background Paper Series, Background Paper: 7 Gender and Poverty in Pakistan ,Khawar Mumtaz ,Poverty Group Country Policy Operations Unit ,Asian Development Bank ,Pakistan Resident Mission.

⁷ Countdown to 2015, Maternal, Newborn & Child Survival. Available at: <http://www.countdown2015mnch.org/country-profiles/pakistan>

c) Access to assets, rights & decision making

Women, especially poor women, have limited ownership (despite their legal right to own and inherit property), access, and control over productive resources.

For poor women, the gender construct compounds their social exclusion. Family hierarchy, relationships within the household, and their belonging to socially excluded groups further isolates them from public assets and decision-making arenas. Older women may exceptionally enter the market if widows, or if without any male bread earner in the household. Customary practices, denial of property and inheritance rights, violence that is embedded in customary practices, absence of available and accessible protection and justice to women, lack of information on their legal, economic, or political rights, and restricted mobility collectively deny women opportunity.

d) Women and the Labour Market

Despite recent gains in terms of employment, a clear gender gap is evident. The female labour participation rate is 22 per cent as compared to males at 88 per cent according to the Economic Survey 2013. Women continue to be under-represented and under-utilised in the economy and labour market. They tend to predominate as unpaid family workers in agriculture, hold low paid, low skill jobs and are at the lowest tiers of the industrial labour force in urban areas.

More than half of these women earn less than 60 per cent of men's incomes. The bulk of the female labour force is employed in the informal sector, and is not covered under legal protection and labour welfare institutional mechanisms. In the urban informal sector 67.5 per cent of women work mostly as home-based or casual workers on low wages, or as domestic workers with extremely low remuneration. Women appear generally unaware of labour laws and are not unionized, therefore unable to exercise their rights⁸.

⁸ International Labour Organization. Decent Work Country Programme 2010-2015, Pg 8. Available at : <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/download/pakistan2010-15.pdf>

Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)

1 - Hill View Road, Banigala, Islamabad - Pakistan.

Phone: +92 - 51 - 261 3935 - 50, Fax: +92 - 51 - 261 3931 - 33, UAN: +92 - 51 - 111 - 000 - 102

Website: www.ppaf.org.pk, Email: mer@ppaf.org.pk